

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

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USIA-06 OMB-01 /066 W

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R 170909Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6125

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 2453

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, RP, LY, XF

SUBJ: MINDANAO PLEBISCITE DECREE

REF: A) MANILA 2272; B) MANILA 2391

1. SUMMARY. THIS MESSAGE TRANSMITS HIGHLIGHTS OF DECREE AUTHORIZING PLEBISCITE IN 13 SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCES TO DETERMINE COMPOSITION OF MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION. VOTERS IN REGIONS 9 AND 12 WILL BE ASKED MARCH 17 IF THEY APPROVE MERGER OF THESE TWO REGIONS; VOTERS IN PALAWAN, SOUTH COTABATO AND DAVAO DEL SUR WILL BE ASKED IF THEY WANT THEIR PROVINCES TO JOIN THE PROPOSED AUTONOMOUS REGION. THE RESPONSIBILITIES WHICH MIGHT DEVOLVE TO AN AUTONOMOUS REGION WOULD BE LIMITED TO THOSE AREAS NOT RESERVED FOR THE NATIONAL OR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. THERE ARE STRONG INDICATIONS THAT THE RESULTS OF THE PLEBISCITE WILL SANCTION THE ESTABLISH-
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MENT OF AN AUTONOMOUS REGION COMPOSED OF REGIONS 9 AND 12, BUT NOT THE THREE ADDITIONAL PROVINCES. END SUMMARY

2. TEXT OF DECREE SIGNED BY PRESIDENT MARCOS FEBRUARY 14, WHICH AUTHORIZES PLEBISCITE TO DETERMINE COMPOSITION OF MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION, HAS NOT YET BEEN RELEASED. EMBASSY WILL POUCH TEXT AS SOON AS AVAILABLE. HIGHLIGHTS

OF THE DECREE, AS REPORTED IN THE LOCAL MEDIA, FOLLOW.

3. THE PLEBISCITE, WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 21 BUT HAS NOW BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL MARCH 17 (SEE REF B.), WILL BE CONDUCTED BY THE BARANGAYS UNDER COMELEC SUPERVISION. ALL VOTERS IN THE 13 SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCES WHO REGISTERED TO VOTE IN THE OCTOBER 1976 REFERENDUM/PLEBISCITE WILL BE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE. COMELEC HAS SENT SPECIAL TEAMS TO THE SOUTH TO REGISTER NEW VOTERS. PLEBISCITE REPORTEDLY WILL BE PRECEDED BY "MASSIVE INFORMATION DRIVE" TO INFORM THE PEOPLE OF ISSUES INVOLVED.

4. VOTERS IN THE TEN PROVINCES WHICH COMPOSE REGIONS 9 AND 12 WILL BE ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTION. "DO YOU APPROVE THE MERGER OF REGIONS 9 AND 12 INTO ONE AUTONOMOUS REGION?" VOTERS IN PALAWAN, DAVAO DEL SUR, AND SOUTH COTABATO WILL BE ASKED: "DO YOU APPROVE THE INCLUSION OF YOUR PROVINCE AS PART OF AN AUTONOMOUS REGION IN SOUTHWESTERN PHILIPPINES (REGION 9 AND/OR 12)?"

5. DURING THE TATASANG BAYAN DELIBERATIONS, WHICH WERE TELEVISED LIVE, SOLICITOR GENERAL MENDOZA WAS ASKED WHAT THE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AUTONOMOUS REGIONS WOULD BE. HE REPLIED THESE WOULD BE LIMITED TO THOSE AREAS, SUCH AS SCHOOLS, HEALTH, AND CULTURE, WHICH ARE NOT THE EXCLUSIVE PEROGATIVES UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF EITHER THE NATIONAL OR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. WHEN A DELEGATE FROM DAVAO DEL SUR ASKED LATER THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE POWERS TO BE GRANTED TO THE MUSLIM REGION AND THE OTHER

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REGIONS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECRETARY RONO REPLIED, "THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL IN POWERS, PEROGATIVES, OR RESPONSIBILITIES."

6. INTERVIEWED ON TV AS HE LEFT THE PODIUM FOLLOWING FEBRUARY 15 BATASANG BAYAN SESSION, MARCOS GAVE CLEAR INDICATION OF WHAT HE EXPECTS THE OUTCOME OF PLEBISCITE WILL BE. HE FIRST NOTED THAT SURVEYS INDICATE THAT THE PEOPLE OF PALAWAN, DAVAO DEL SUR, AND SOUTH COTABATO WOULD PREFER TO REMAIN OUTSIDE AUTONOMOUS MUSLIM REGION AND SAID PLEBISCITE WOULD ALLOW THEM TO DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES. HE THEN SAID HE "WOULD STRONGLY SUGGEST AND APPEAL TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE VOTING POPULACE WITHIN THE TWO REGIONS, REGIONS 9 AND 12, TO NOW AGREE TO A UNIFIED REGION." HE WARNED THE CHRISTIAN AND TRIBAL MINORITIES IN THOSE TWO REGIONS THAT IF THEY DID NOT VOTE FOR THE MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION, "THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THIS ENCLAVE MAY DEVELOP INTO A COMPLETELY ALIEN AND STRANGE CULTURE WHICH MIGHT NOT BE ASSIMILATED INTO THE NATIONAL CULTURE."

7. COMMENT: HASTE WITH WHICH PLEBISCITE WAS ANNOUNCED
AND THE FRAMING OF PLEBISCITE QUESTIONS SUGGEST
STRONGLY THAT THE RESULTS ARE PRE-ORDAINED. PALAWAN,
SOUTH COTABATO, AND DAVAO DEL SUR, WHERE MUSLIMS ARE IN THE
CLEAR MINORITY AND WHICH REPORTEDLY WERE INCLUDED IN THE
TRIPOLI AGREEMENT AT INSISTENCE OF QADHAFI, EVIDENTLY WILL
VOTE NOT TO JOIN REGION 9 AND 12 AND WILL THEREFORE
REMAIN IN THEIR EXISTING REGIONS. IT SEEMS JUST AS CER-
TAIN THAT A MAJORITY IN REGION 9 AND 12 WILL VOTE TO
JOIN THE MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION. WHILE IT IS STILL
UNCLEAR WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF INDIVIDUAL PROVINCES WITHIN
THE REGIONS 9 AND 12, SOME OF WHICH HAVE LARGE CHRISTIAN
AND TRIBAL POPULATIONS, VOTE NOT TO JOIN THE MUSLIM REGION,
MARCOS' APPEAL TO NON-MUSLIMS IN THESE REGIONS TO VOTE
"YES" NOW MAKES THIS OUTCOME SEEM UNLIKELY.
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